



Consumer Care of Poinsettias

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Poinsettias are the traditional Christmas plant because of their colorful bracts. The bracts are actually modified leaves and the yellow cyathia in the center of the bracts are the true flowers. Plant breeders have introduced many new cultivars over the past few years and there are over 100 cultivars currently available. The array of colors range from red, pink, white, salmon, to bicolors. With these new, longer lasting cultivars being available, it is possible for a properly cared for poinsettia to remain beautiful in the home for 2 to 3 months.

The poinsettia is a small tree and is native to the tropical areas of southern Mexico and Central America. It was introduced to the United States in 1825 by Joel Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico. The name poinsettia is derived from his name. The botanical name for the poinsettia is *Euphorbia pulcherrima*.

Poinsettias are not poisonous, but eating them is not recommended. Those who are sensitive may experience minor eye and skin irritations if they come in contact with the milky white, latex sap.

Purchasing Plants

Select plants which have brightly colored bracts and dark green foliage covering most of the stem. Avoid plants

which have dropped their leaves, are wilted, or have faded, torn, or discolored bracts. This indicates the plants were not properly cared for (i.e. not watered, boxed or sleeved too long, or diseased) and the length of enjoyment of the plant will be dramatically shortened. Some common causes for failure of poinsettias to last are listed in Table 1. Traditionally, the presence or absence of the true flowers or cyathia (the small, round, yellow parts located in the center of the bracts) has been the measurement of freshness. As the plant ages, the cyathia typically drop. However, many of the newer cultivars have improved cyathia retention or there are few cyathia present, which limits the use of cyathia as an indicator of age.

Since poinsettias are tropical plants, temperatures below 50°F will cause chilling injury. The "selling" establishment should sleeve or cover the plant when the plants could be exposed to temperatures below 50°F. Poinsettia plants should be kept in a warm vehicle, but not placed in the trunk of an automobile. Chilling injury causes the bracts to have a blue or white discoloration and possibly result in leaf drop.

Watering

Water the plants so that the planting medium (soil) is slightly wet, but not soggy. Poinsettias do not like "wet feet". If the pot is covered with decorative foil, remember to punch a few drainage holes in the bottom. Pour off any water

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